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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the English lexical items "even" and "only" looks at features of their behavior in discourse and brings attention to certain unexamined aspects of their role in text. Their syntactic behavior is reviewed and some problems with previous interpretations are examined. The features of "even" are defined: (1) "even" connects the element it associates with, with the element (set) of the same category mentioned in the preceding context; (2) "even" signals that the element it associates with joins the set of elements mentioned in the preceding context (a feature or element is added); and (3) "even" has negative implications with regard to the element it associates with, in that it implies that what the element does exceeds its normal state and would not normally be the case under the present circumstances. The features of "only" are defined: (1) same as "even"; (2) "only" signals that the element it associates with does not belong to the set given in the preceding context (a feature or element is removed from the set); and (3) "only" has a negative implication with respect to the element it associates with, in that it implies that the element (now constituting a set of its own) must not exceed its limits. (MSE)

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The Contextual Nature of Even and Only

Aleksander Szwedek

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A C T A U N I V E R S I T A T I S N I C O L A I C O P E R N I C I
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THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF *EVEN* AND *ONLY*

The linguistic behaviour of such lexical items as *even* and *only* has drawn attention of many linguists (A n d e r s o n 1972, J a c k e n d o f f 1972, F r a s e r 1971, to mention only a few working with the English particles). They have been described in terms of their syntax and semantics, including such phenomena as association with focus.

In the present paper I would like to reiterate some of the features of their behaviour, and to bring into light certain new aspects of their role in the text, with particular emphasis on their role in the information structure of the sentence, as well as their contextual nature.

The syntactic behaviour of *even* and *only* is quite well known (cf. A n d e r s o n 1972, J a c k e n d o f f 1972, F r a s e r 1971). They associate with the NP immediately following them (at the same time the noun has to bear sentence stress), for example:

(1) Even JOHN gave his daughter a new bicycle.
(2) John gave even his DAUGHTER a new bicycle.
(3) Only JOHN gave his daughter a new bicycle.
(4) John gave only his DAUGHTER a new bicycle.

When *even* and *only* occur in the auxiliary position, they associate with the item in focus (i.e. the item under sentence stress), as in the following examples:

(5) JOHN even gave his daughter a new bicycle.
(6) John even gave his DAUGHTER a new bicycle.
(7) JOHN only gave his daughter a new bicycle.
(8) John only gave his DAUGHTER a new bicycle.

There is though, one exception to this regularity: with *even* and *only* in the auxiliary position and focus on the 'new' noun *bicycle*, the scope of association of *even* and *only* is undetermined. As J a c k e n d o f f (1972) demonstrates on examples like the following:

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(9) John even gave his daughter a new BICYCLE.

(10) John only gave his daughter a new BICYCLE.

the readings depend on the choice of the scope of focus: „*even* can go with *a new bicycle*, the VP, and perhaps the entire S." (Jackendoff 1972: 248).

As I pointed out in Szwedek (1986), this is connected with the undetermined scope of focus in sentences with neutral interpretation, i.e. with the stress on the 'new' noun, if there is one in the sentence.

To give a simple example, if we consider (11) below in isolation, it will turn out to have an indetermined scope of focus. The scope of focus depends on the context and it is different for the same sentence (11) in the context of (12) and different in the context of (13):

(12) What were you doing last night?

(11) I was reading a BOOK. (scope: reading a book)

and

(13) What were you reading last night?

(11) I was reading a BOOK. (scope: a book)

Experiments (cf. Pakosz 1980) have shown clearly that 'the scope of focus' cannot be determined on the basis of the focus (i.e. sentence stress), but recourse to the preceding context is always necessary (in neutral interpretation). If it is the context that determines what was supposed to be the scope of focus (i.e. its syntagmatic relation to the segmental structure), then the two have to be dissociated: what used to be regarded as „the scope of focus" is nothing else than 'new' information section in relation to (determined by) the preceding context.

A consequence of this is that, if the scope of *even* and *only* is also determined by the context, as Jackendoff (1972: 248) suggests, then rather than association with focus, we should regard the phenomenon as association with 'new' information.

The interpretation of examples (5)—(8) is easy. Sentence stress on given' information (with a simultaneous lack of stress on 'new' information *bicycle*) renders the sentences emphatic in which case emphasis is restricted to one item only; thus *even* and *only* associate with only one lexical item and the question of scope does not arise. Hence the illusion that *even* and *only* associate with focus. However, as I have shown above (examples (12)—(11) and (13)—(11)) they associate with new information. This is why, depending on the context (and not on focus) „*even* can go with *a new bicycle*, the VP, and perhaps the entire S." (Jackendoff 1972: 248). The following examples illustrate this point (naturally, appropriate changes have to be introduced into the original sentences when put in a context):

(14) John likes to spoil his daughter. He gave her a new doll. He

(John) even gave her (his daughter) a new BICYCLE.

(15) John does not like to spoil his daughter. His wife gave her a new Mercedes. John only gave his daughter a new BICYCLE.

As we can see, only *bicycle* associates with *even* and *only*. Let us now consider the same sentences in a different context:

(16) John likes to spoil his daughter. He took her to the cinema. He even gave her (his daughter) a new BICYCLE.

(17) John doesn't like to spoil his children. His wife took their son to Hawaii. John only gave his daughter a new BICYCLE.

In (16) *even* associates with *gave (her) a new bicycle*, and in (17) *only* associates with *gave his daughter a new bicycle*. Notice that in all four examples (14)—(17) sentence stress (focus) remains unchanged.

The examples clearly show that, as I pointed out for *even* (Szwedek 1986), *even* and *only* associate with 'new' information in the sentence.

Semantically, *even* has been described in various ways. Jackendoff, for example, says that „the association of *even* with a constituent implies that there is something special, unusual, or unexpected about the connection of the constituent with the event" (Jackendoff 1972: 249). Fraser (1971) introduced the notion of expectations to the meaning of *even*, and broke the explication of (18)

(18) Even Max tried on the pants.

into three parts:

(19) a. Max tried on the pants.
b. Other people tried on the pants.
c. The speaker would not expect or would not expect the hearer to expect Max to try on the pants.

In a recent book Grochowski (1986) repeats the three — point explication:

(20) Even S_1 is P: a. There are such S's which are P (Fraser's b.)
b. I expected S_1 not to be P (Fraser's c.)
c. S_1 is P (Fraser's a.)

Essentially agreeing with Fraser I pointed out (Szwedek 1986) that the essence of the meaning of *even* consists in double contrast: first, a contrast between the expressed state (Max tried on the pants) and what in considered to be the normal state of the object (Max would not be expected to try on pants on that particular occasion for whatever reason: because he was not in the mood, does not normally try on pants, etc.). Secondly, a contrast between what is considered to be the normal state of the object and what is considered to be the state of other comparable (mentioned) objects (other people tried on the pants). By emphasizing

the contrastive factor of the meaning of *even* I wanted to bring out its contextual character. Nothing can be contrasted unless there is something to contrast it with. In Szwedek (1986) I also wrote that the contrastive character of *even*-sentences is supported by the fact that *even* does not go together with cleft sentences (cf. Fraser 1971: 156—157) which are themselves contrastive. All this means that *even*-sentences are natural sequence sentences.

The minimal context in which we can felicitously use (18) can be taken to be something like (21):

(21) John tried on the pants. Joe tried on the pants, and David tried on the pants.

(18) Even Max tried on the pants.

It is simply difficult to imagine that (18) could open a conversation between, say, Jackendoff and Fraser, unless some other people's trying on the pants had been mentioned before [1].

If we accept this line of reasoning, then Fraser's (19)b. and Grochowski's (20)a. is part of the preceding context [2].

On the other hand, Fraser's (19)a. and Grochowski's (20)c. is part of the actual utterance with *even*. Thus one might suspect that the meaning of *even* is Fraser's (19)c. and Grochowski's (20)b.

What is left of the explication, as I see it, if we remove Frasers' (19)b. and Grochowski's (20)a. from the explication to the context, is the contrast between what Max did and what is known about his behaviour on such occasions, so that comparison is possible (this is in essential agreement with what Jackendoff calls „unusual and unexpected", and Fraser calls „expectations"). More specifically, as I suggested in Szwedek (1986: 132), *even* puts the element it associates with, outside the boundaries of the set implied in the sentence. Thus we could say about (18) that Max belongs to the set of people who do not try on pants, or do not try on pants in certain circumstances, but on that particular occasion he did try on the pants, putting himself outside this set, and at the same time joining the set of people who do try on pants.

The examples discussed above are relatively easy to interpret. Certain

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[1] Notice that one of the difficulties with sentences like (18) is their structural incompatibility with (21) as the preceding context. With (21) as the opening sentence, (18) would have to be something like *Even Max did*. As a matter of fact it would be difficult to find an opening sentence in which (18) would sound perfectly natural, though native speakers say that (18) is not too bad after (21).

[2] Van Dijk (1972) suggests that „Since presuppositions are always represented as sentences, we may consider the set of presuppositions, followed by the sentence(s) presupposing them, to be part of a text." (van Dijk 1972: 103).

difficulties might arise in the following examples, mentioned by Fraser (1971) and discussed by Szwedek (1986: 144):

(22) *John slept and Harry even RESTED.

(23) Harry rested and John even SLEPT.

In both cases *even* is associated with the verb, so the explication of (22) would supposedly be as follows:

(24) a. There are such *rests* which Harry did.

b. I expected that *rest*s would not be what Harry did.

c. Harry rested.

There are at least three problems connected with this explication:

1) the rather awkward a. and b., which perhaps can be manipulated or tolerated for the sake of argumentation,

2) connected with it, different forms of 'S is P' in a. and b. in relation to c.,

3) if we accept 1) and 2), c. would predict that *Harry even rested* is correct, and therefore this kind of explication would predict both (22) and (23) correct.

In Szwedek (1986) I suggested that the answer to the problem of the difference between the correctness of (22) and (23) must be sought in the context. I proposed then to base the explanation on the role of the elements associated with *even* in the information structure of the sentence. I find, however, that such an explanation does not work with *only*, and therefore some other solution must be sought.

One of the features of (22) and (23) is that the meanings of the verbs are in the relation of inclusion, i.e. *sleep* has all the features of *rest* plus some more features restricting its meaning, while *rest* has only some features of *sleep*; thus the meaning of the verb *sleep* contains the meaning of the verb *rest*, and therefore is more restricted, narrower.

As examples (22) and (23) show, *even* associates with the narrower verb, but not with the broader verb.

It is interesting to observe, I think, that the same narrower-broader basis, also determines the acceptability of the following text:

(25) People tried on the pants. Even Max tried on the pants.

(26) *Max tried on the pants. Even people tried on the pants.

The examples discussed so far show that *even* means that the element it associates with, is added (or a feature is added) to the set given in the preceding context.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion we can I think, make the following points:

(27) a. *even* connects the element it associates with, with the element (set) of the same category mentioned in the preceding context;

b. *even* signals that the element it associates with, joins the set of elements mentioned in the preceding context; (a feature or an element is added);

c. *even* has negative implications with regard to the element it associates with, in that it implies that what the element does exceeds its normal state, would not normally be the case under the present circumstances (i.e. Max would not try on the pants, sleep would be impossible for John).

Essentially, this is what Fraser (1971) says, but at the same time this description makes a clearer distinction between the context and implications (the meaning of *even*).

It seems that *only* can be analysed in a similar fashion. Intuitively *only* singles out a member of a set, contrasting it at the same time with the other members of this set. Grochowski (1986) explicates *only* in the following way:

(28) a. S_1 is P.

b. No other S is P.

It is, I think, a bit surprising to find that no expectation is involved here in comparison with the explication of *even*. One might postulate that similarly to the explication of *even*, the explication of *only* should be as follows:

(29) a. I expected that S would be P.

b. S_1 is P.

c. No other S is P.

(or perhaps: b. No S is P; c. S_1 is P).

Another objection against Grochowski's analysis is connected with the context. As we have seen earlier, sentences with *even* do not open a discourse. We have also seen that earlier explications of *even* (Fraser 1971, Grochowski 1986) contained what I consider to be the context of the sentence with *even* (Fraser's b. and Grochowski's a.). What is lacking then in Grochowski's analysis of *only* (which is based on a rather extensive review of available descriptions) in comparison with the description of *even* (though given only in the form of an implication), is the element with which the item associated with *only* could be compared.

I think we might take (30) as a typical, or at least common context for (31):

(30) Everybody was talking.

(31) Only Max was eating.

The necessity of a context like (30) for (31) can be supported by a comparison of the following two sequences of sentences:

(32) I entered the room. Everybody was talking.

Only Max was eating.

(33) I entered the room. Only Max was eating.

I find (33) definitely odd, and my intuition has been supported by native speakers (the same judgements have been made by native speakers of Polish for the Polish equivalents of (32) and (33)).

In examples like those discussed above as (22) and (23), *only* reverses the order of the verbs for acceptability / unacceptability distinction:

(34) John slept and Harry only RESTED.

(35) *Harry rested and John only SLEPT.

In (34) *only* restricts the action in comparison with the preceding context, taking away a feature (according to OED it would probably be „unconsciousness" (?) and/or „suspension of the activity of the nervous system"). Likewise, a consideration of (30)—(31) can lead to the conclusion, that *only* takes an element out of the set given in the preceding context. Such an approach explains the reverse behaviour of ***even*** and ***only*** with respect to the element they associate with.

This is also shown in the necessary sequence of verbs depending on whether the subject associates with *even* or *only*:

(36) a. Everybody was talking.
b. Nobody was eating (not-talking)
c. (Even) Max was talking.
d. *(Even) Max was eating.

(37) a. Everybody was talking.
b. Nobody was eating (not-talking).
c. *(Only) Max was talking
d. (Only) Max was eating.

In (36), *even* adds Max to the set of talking people, so the verb has to remain the same; in (37), *only* excludes Max from the set of talking people, so the verb has to change.

Thus the features of *only* can be summarized in the following way:

(38) a. *only* connects the element it associates with, with the element (set) of the same category in the preceding context;
b. *only* signals that the element it associates with does not belong to the set given in the preceding context (a feature or an element is taken out of the set);
c. *only* has a negative implication with respect to the element it associates with in that it implies that the element (constituting now a set of its own) must not exceed its limits (Grochowski's *No other S is P*).

A comparison of *even* and *only* exhibits similarities as to their cohesive nature, and differences in their choice of context which reflects

differences in meaning: addition to another set and transgression of its own set *(even)* versus deduction (separation) from a set and restriction of the newly formed set *(only)*.

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